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Extending Educational Opportunity -- Problems of Recruitment and Admissions, High Risk Students, Cultural Deprivation, Etc.

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The readiness of US universities to enroll black students was particularly evident between Fall 1967 and Fall 1968. The growing number of potential non-white college students and the militance of those already enrolled present a new challenge to institutions of higher education and raise many issues, 4 of which are of special import: (1) before promising to meet militant student demands concerning the percentage of black students to be enrolled, each college or university needs to reevaluate its educational objectives and financial resources, arrive at an independent and realistic decision, then make a sustained effort to achieve its goals. Results of this examination might vary; black enrollments might not increase from the present 27 at some institutions but they might go up to 20% or 30% at others, such as public colleges in urban settings. (2) The fact that racial issues will continue to be important but difficult aspects of US society must be considered when colleges seek to arrive at conclusions regarding their enrollments of minority group students. (3) Some consensus must be reached within the academic community on how students and institutions will be financed. Massive local, state and federal support would seem to be one solution. (4) Relationships between elementary, secondary and higher education institutions need improvement. Cooperative attitudes among the 3 levels would lead to smoother transition of disadvantaged youth from school to college.

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Summary of Analyst's
Paper for Discussion
Group I
Wednesday
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Group I EXTENDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY--
PROBLEMS OF RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS,
HIGH RISK STUDENTS, CULTURAL DEPRIVATION, ETC.

by

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I am now attempting to secure and analyze the 1968-69 data from institutional compliance reports filed with the Civil Rights Office of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. If I secure these data before January 15, I shall begin the paper with a very short report of change in Negro enrollments in higher institutions from 1967-68 to 1968-69. I shall say (whatever the numerical changes) that this has surely been the year in which higher institutions have voluntarily or involuntarily shown the greatest interest in enrollment of black students, and to some degree other minority and poverty group youth.

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The assassination of Martin Luther King in April, 1968, and the militance of black students already enrolled, are important elements in this new institutional concern, but we must also recognize that the proportion of black youth who graduate from high school--and are, therefore, potential college students--has risen dramatically, so that the colleges quite literally face a new challenge. (The educational attainment of persons 25 to 29 years old who are non-white, as given by the Bureau of the Census, shows that in 1960 39 per cent were high school graduates, while in 1968, 58 per cent had completed high school.)

This new situation raises innumerable issues for higher institutions, of which the following four seem to me to be particularly important:

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First, higher institutions should each take an honest and individual position on the question of enrolling black students. At this writing, there are almost daily reports of college presidents who have agreed that in the future they will enroll black students as 11 per cent of their student bodies--this figure coming from the demands of militant black students who base it upon the proportion of blacks in the total population. A few institutions will be able to deliver on these promises but for most we must conclude that the presidents either are dishonest or that they have not done their homework. (Here a short review of the figures concerning black high school graduates, financial problems, measured educational attainment and scholastic aptitude, etc.) What is needed is for each institution to review its own mission, resources and circumstances and then make a serious sustained effort to achieve a proper and realistic goal. It is hard saying, but this will mean that some institutions will conclude that their black enrollments will remain less than 2 per cent of their total student bodies for the foreseeable future. It also means, however, that some institutions--notably publicly supported colleges located in urban centers--will not be able to avoid the conclusion that they must do whatever is necessary to achieve enrollments of 20 to 30 per cent black students. In some areas, institutions will need also, of course, to come to grips with the problems of Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans or American Indians, as well as of the white underclass.

Secondly, whatever an institution's conclusions concerning its goals for enrollment of minority groups and of other "disadvantaged," every institution needs to decide how it is to deal with the fact that questions relating to race are and will remain among the most important and difficult in American society. Institutions which conclude that they will not be able to enroll significant numbers of black students will in many ways have the most difficult problem, for they must either deal substantively with issues of race in the absence of minority group youth in the student body, or they must ignore these issues with educational consequences which will not be pleasant. Institutions which do enroll substantial numbers of black youth are already discovering the determination of these students to have an important voice in curriculum construction.

Third, higher education collectively should come to some conclusions about how the bills are to be paid. Everyone now understands, I believe, that it is senseless to talk of "universal higher education," or to talk of anything except a class system of higher education, unless there is to be massive financial support for students and for institutions. It is also fairly clear that this support must come from government, at one level or another, if it is coming at all. But on this issue, higher education is

in its usual disarray, and there exists a latent conflict between higher and lower levels of education with respect to the distribution of public support. There is really no need to discuss questions of recruitment or curriculum for minority groups in colleges and universities unless the question of financial support is to be given close and continued attention by higher education, in the hope that something approximating a consensus can be developed. Of course, it is likely that civil war in education is unavoidable.

Finally, the relationship of the higher and lower educational institutions must be reconstructed (or constructed for the first time) in the case of youth from minority or poverty groups. It is not too much to say that the major activities of higher institutions in both recruitment and curriculum construction for minority group youth makes it clear that the competence and good will of both the guidance and the instructional personnel of elementary and secondary schools is being questioned. It is currently accepted doctrine--apparently not even open to serious debate--that higher institutions that wish to recruit disadvantaged students should not only not depend upon the guidance services of the secondary schools, but should actually plan to evade them. The standard assumption with respect to the curriculum is either that the college can do in a short space of time what the schools have not done in twelve years, or that the preferred preparatory school is one outside the regular public school structure. There is considerable justification for these attitudes, just as there is considerable ground for recriminations directed from the schools to the colleges. No doubt irregular programs need to be continued and even expanded, but in the long run the normal school-to-college relationship must be rearranged to do the bulk of the work. There is simply no other way that the bulk of the work can be done. Higher institutions have substantial responsibility for carrying through this reconstruction.

At the root of these and all the other immediate issues lie the immemorial questions, "What is college for?", and "Who is college for?"